

MacArthur Foundation Safety and Justice Challenge

Community Engagement & Racial Equity Language Guide

October 31, 2019

Introduction:

Philadelphia's efforts to meaningfully engage community voices and tackle racial disparities in the reform effort are at a critical moment. As this work grows, this document is intended as a guide to help us talk about directly impacted communities and communities of color accurately, thoughtfully, and consistently.

Language is a powerful tool to challenge power structures, build mutually respectful relationships, change attitudes and beliefs, and achieve structural change. By moving away from phrasing that has historically disparaged and minimized groups, we can shift how we view race, gender, and different cultures within government and address potential biases in our language. We can also use language to create an inclusive environment in which community members feel respected and comfortable contributing their insights. This is particularly important given the historically strained relationship between the criminal justice system and the communities it most impacts. Lastly, putting thought into the language we use will encourage us to be precise about the information we collect, the assumptions underlying our policies and practices, and our desired impacts throughout the reform effort.

This is a **living, collective document** that should evolve along with our learning, growth, and reflection. It is intended to serve as a tool for the SJC Implementation Team and Workgroups as the reform effort continues to evolve. Please send feedback or updates to shebani.rao@phila.gov.

Key Principles:

- 1) Person-first language:** Person-first language aims to keep the focus on humanity and individuals' personhood – it treats as secondary other descriptors and categories that may serve to stereotype or label people.
- 2) Intersectionality:** This term refers to the cumulative way in which multiple forms of discrimination can overlap (e.g. racism, sexism, ableism, classism) and shape the experiences of marginalized groups. Although our MacArthur work is focused on reducing racial disparities, it is important for us to name and understand how racism intersects with other forms of oppression to promote equity in our work.
- 3) Self-identification:** Whenever possible, allow people and groups to choose how to describe themselves. This act conveys respect and returns power to individuals and groups, whereas using inaccurate or historically oppressive categories risks doing the opposite. When you're not sure, ask! (A perfect example of self-identification is asking and correctly using someone's pronouns. See the City's [Pronouns: A Resource Guide](#) (2019) for more information.)
- 4) Focus on systemic causes:** This guide encourages us to acknowledge structural racism and systemic causes of inequality whenever possible and avoid implying responsibility on the part of a given community for disparate outcomes. (e.g. Using "underinvested" instead of "poor" to describe a neighborhood demonstrates an awareness of the historical, structural factors that may have shaped the neighborhood's trajectory.)
- 5) Shared values:** Language that focuses on shared values and experiences - and that stays away from "us vs. them" characterizations - can help build consensus and momentum for reform.

- 6) **Active voice:** Active voice clearly identifies who or what is performing an action. It helps us be specific about who or what might be causing a particular outcome – whether the subject is an individual, an institution, or a cultural norm. Passive voice can subtly signal that certain disparate outcomes are natural or inevitable.
- 7) **Asset-Based Approach:** This guide emphasizes asset-based language (e.g. “graduation rate”) rather than deficit-based language (e.g. “drop-out rate”) when describing communities and community members. While deficit-focused messaging or data can sometimes play a role in mobilizing action, it can also serve to perpetuate harmful stereotypes and even reduce interest in problem solving. When possible, combine deficit-focused data or messaging with solutions or strategies.
- 8) **Being mindful of jargon and acronyms:** Relying heavily on systems-related jargon or acronyms, or using language that is overly dense and technical, may serve to alienate and shut out individuals who don’t work within government. Using language that is accessible – and providing context and explanation where needed - is crucial for creating an inclusive environment in which everyone can contribute.

Suggestions for Inclusive Language:

Note: This is not intended to be a hard-and-fast set of rules, and context will and should affect how the words on this list are used.

Area	Recommended Terminology	Avoidable/Outdated/Less Specific Terminology
Race and Ethnicity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use terms like “ethnic minority” or “linguistic minority” only when referring to numerical minorities. • Reference specific racial and ethnic groups whenever possible (see “Best Practices on Ethnic and Racial Designations,” below). • “People of color” should be used sparingly and ideally should be followed by more racially specific data/examples/statements. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Minorities: Non-white groups are the majority in many U.S. cities, and the term “minority” can connote powerlessness. • Diverse: This is a broad term that we sometimes use when we really mean “non-white.” Additionally, a noun that references a solitary person, place, or thing cannot be diverse. • People of color: This term is overly general and can conflate multiple groups with specific needs and experiences. The term can also be a euphemism for a specific group (e.g. black, Latinx). • Other terms that may evoke racial stereotypes: “those people,” “good kids” vs “scary kids,” “hardworking” vs. “lazy,” “entitled.”
Economy and Class	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Low-income, underinvested, historically underrepresented, economically marginalized • Person experiencing homelessness • Communities that experience high rates of violence 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Poor, disadvantaged, underserved, crime-ridden, inner-city • Homeless people or “the homeless” • Violent communities
Immigration/Refugees	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Person seeking citizenship, undocumented, child of immigrants, asylum-seeker, refugee • Resident (more inclusive than citizen) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Illegal, legal, alien • Citizen (when referring to a broad group of people who may not have the rights and responsibilities of citizens)
Criminal Justice	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Person who is incarcerated, person convicted of _____ (e.g. “person convicted of a sex offense” instead of “sex offender”) • Person who has been incarcerated, returning resident • Person on parole/probation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “The bodies,” offender, inmate, the incarcerated, criminal, felon, thug, robber • Ex-offender, the formerly incarcerated, ex-con, ex-felon • Parolee or Probationer • Juvenile

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Children, young adults • System impacted (can include loved ones of people who have been incarcerated) 	
Gender and Sexuality	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Hi, everyone,” “hi, all” as greetings • Use gender-inclusive ways to address people, like “everyone” or “students” • Use the pronoun “they” if you don’t know someone’s pronouns • Person, individual • Transgender person, transgender (adj.) • Cisgender man, cisgender woman • Genderfluid, non-binary • Sex reassignment (SRS) or gender affirming surgery • Always use a transgender person’s chosen name • LGBTQ or LGBTQIA+ community (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, intersex, asexual). As always, go with an individual’s self-identification (e.g. queer, gay, lesbian) when referring to them • Orientation, identity • Use examples of same-sex partners and families, draw on LGBTQ people’s lives and experiences 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Hey guys” as a greeting • Assuming there are only two genders through our language (e.g. “ladies and gentlemen,” “boys and girls,” “brothers and sisters”) • Him, her, she, he as a default/when you don’t know someone’s pronouns • Man • Transgender as a noun (e.g. “transgenders”) • Biological man, biological woman • He-she, she-male • Sex-change or sex-change operation • Not using a transgender person’s chosen name • Homosexual, non-straight • Lifestyle, preference • Always assuming heterosexual orientation and using heterosexual examples as the norm
Disability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Person with a disability • Person with ____ • Person who uses a wheelchair • Non-disabled 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Disabled person, handicapped, crippled, patient, challenged, impaired • Victim of____, suffering from_____ • Wheelchair-bound • Able-bodied
Mental health	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Person with SMI diagnosis, person with ____ • Person with bipolar disorder • Opted not to, has not begun, experiencing ambivalence 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Psycho, schizo, crazy, dumb, slow, retarded, mentally disabled, mentally ill • Bipolar person or “they’re bipolar” • Noncompliant, unmotivated, resistant

Substance Use	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Person struggling with addiction, person living with substance use disorder ● Substance use disorder ● Someone with alcoholism, someone with an alcohol problem ● Person in recovery ● Opted not to, has not begun, experiencing ambivalence 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Addict ● Substance abuse ● Alcoholic ● Recovering drug addict ● Noncompliant, unmotivated, resistant
Community	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● The term “community” can be used, but whenever possible, context should be added to clarify the <i>type</i> of community to which we are referring. We recommend using specific terminology to refer to distinct groups of people (e.g. racial or ethnic groups, neighborhoods, advocates, service providers, etc.) instead of using “community” as a blanket term to refer to all people outside of government. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Community: May be appropriate in places, but this term is often overused, implies consensus or homogeneity that probably doesn’t exist, and is abstract – be more specific, if possible. Note that plural usage may avoid some of these challenges, e.g., “communities within x neighborhood.”

Best Practices on Ethnic and Racial Designations:

- Some races and ethnicities have multiple terms associated with them. Whenever possible, ask for a preference.
- Capitalize the proper names of nationalities, peoples, tribes, etc.
- Use **Native American, American Indian, First Nation, or Indigenous person** instead of “Indian.” Always ask and refer to individuals’ specific tribes, nations, or communities to be more accurate.
- Do not hyphenate ethnic classifications like **African American** or **Asian American**.
- Avoid the use of **black** and **white** as nouns; they are acceptable when referencing statistical information.
- **African, African American, black:** Not all black people are African Americans (if they were born outside of the United States). Defer to preference to determine which term to use. Be as specific as possible when honoring preferences, such as Haitian American, Jamaican American, etc.
- **Latino/a, Latin@, or LatinX** (pronounced *la-teen-X*) refers to someone of Latin American origin. The -o/a, -@, or -X ending are variations used to acknowledge multiple genders. This set of terms is preferable to using Hispanic, which commonly refers to people from countries colonized by Spain in the Americas. Use more specific identification such as Mexican American, Puerto Rican, etc. whenever possible.

A Note on Inclusive Images:

Just like language shapes how we view groups, the images we share can also serve to perpetuate or break down stereotypes. When choosing and placing images, avoid those that:

- a) Invoke racial, gender-based, class-based, or other stereotypes (e.g. a female assistant, a black or brown child paired with deficit-focused outcomes, associating neighborhoods solely with crime or violence);
- b) Do not represent the diversity of Philadelphia (e.g. exclusively using photos with heterosexual, blonde, thin parents to represent American families);
- c) Show people who are incarcerated or have been incarcerated only in powerless or stereotypical settings (e.g. in handcuffs, behind bars);
- d) Only using images of Center City or the Philadelphia skyline to represent the city.

Consider using sources like the following for images (make sure to follow citation guidelines):

- 1) Getty Images' [Lean In Collection](#) shares powerful, non-stereotypical photos of women and girls.
- 2) Getty Images' [Muslim Girls Collection](#) shows Muslim women and girls being themselves.
- 3) Vice's [Gender Spectrum Collection](#) features trans and non-binary models in a variety of settings (health, school, lifestyle, etc.)
- 4) [Nappy.co](#) is a stock photo site featuring images of black and brown people.

Adapted from the Following Sources:

- 1) Northwestern University's [Inclusive Language Guide](#), 2019.
- 2) Hanna Thomas and Anna Hirsch's [A Progressive Style Guide](#), 2016.
- 3) [Buzzfeed Style Guide](#), 2014 (updated 2018).
- 4) Berkeley Underground Scholars, [Language Guide for Communicating About Those Involved in the Carceral System](#), 2019.
- 5) The Fortune Society Reentry Education Project, [Words Matter](#).
- 6) University of Maryland's Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual & Transgender Equity Center, [Good Practices: Inclusive Language](#).
- 7) National Association of Black Journalists, [NAJB Style Guide](#).
- 8) Asian American Journalist Association, [Guide to Covering Asian America](#).
- 9) Native American Journalists Association, [Reporting and Indigenous Terminology](#).
- 10) Race Forward, [Race Reporting Guide](#), 2015.
- 11) The Opportunity Agenda, [A Social Justice Communications Toolkit](#).
- 12) Racial Equity Tools, [Race Matters – Advancing Better Outcomes for All Children: Reporting Data Using a Racial Equity Lens](#).
- 13) The Radical Copyeditor, [Should I Use the Adjective “Diverse?”](#)
- 14) Sprout, [Inclusive Language Guidelines](#).